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Written statement* submitted by Make Mothers Matter, a non-governmental organization in general consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is hereby circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[2 February 2018]

* This written statement is issued, unedited, in the language(s) received from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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The transformative power of mothers for sustainable peace

The UN General Secretary has rightly put the prevention of conflicts and sustaining peace at the heart of his mandate. Make Mothers Matter (MMM) wants to reassert the essential role and transformative power of mothers for sustainable development and peace.

Peace begins in the home

Peace is not merely the absence of violence or conflict at the national and/or international levels. It may take different forms and begins at a much smaller scale: peace with oneself and peace of mind at an individual level; harmonious and balanced relationships within a family; social cohesion and solidarity at the community level.

The educational role of parents, in particular that of mothers, is crucial, including as role models. It is within a family that one's emotional balance is built, where fundamental values are transmitted and upon which human beings construct themselves.

It is also within the family that a child first experiences and learns the meaning of safety or distress, the joys and challenges of living in a community, and the violent or peaceful management of conflicts.

A child's early years are especially crucial and early childhood development has an important potential for the promotion of peace. An increasing amount of research stresses how safety, responsive caregiving and emotional ties within a family are equally essential for the physical, emotional, social and intellectual development of a child, beginning as early as during pregnancy.

Peace emanates from equal opportunities with a role for each one of us in a society: social injustice is one of the main triggers of social unrest and violence. Allowing children to grow up in a healthy and loving family without violence will allow them to reach their full potential, and to find their role in society. Early childhood development and care has the potential to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and is the foundation for a long-lasting peace.

Mothers build bridges

Mothers also have the ability to gather and mobilize other mothers, to build bridges across social classes, race and ethnicity: they all share the same concerns and desire of a better future for their children, beginning with peace.

An emblematic example is the Women Wage Peace Movement. Created in 2014, it brings together women from all nations and of all religions, and aims for a peaceful and nonviolent solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

An example within MMM Network of a women association contributing to peace building is Asodamas in Columbia. With the « Casas sociales de la Mujer » and under the patronage of the first ladies of various provinces, the association helps women victims of the conflict to reconstruct their lives. The empowerment of these vulnerable women, most of them mothers, is crucial for ensuring sustainable peace in Colombia.

Peace and the 2030 development Agenda: the transformative power of mothers

As recalled by the UN SG, "The best means of prevention, and of sustaining peace, is inclusive and sustainable

development."1

Empowering mothers can have wide ranging positive impacts, cutting across many Sustainable Development Goals2. It means investing in children and families, but the potential returns are high.

Mothers must be recognized as change makers, who can be instrumental in the realization the 2030 development agenda and sustainable peace - if only they are adequately educated and supported in their different roles as caregivers, head of household, food producers, decision makers, economic agent, etc.

Working for peace with mothers

To empower mothers for peace, MMM calls on governments to:

- Invest in maternal health (including maternal mental health) and early childhood development, especially targeting the most disadvantaged families: it is a key strategy for the eradication of poverty and sustainable peace

- Address violence against women and violence against children: violence against children (including abuse, physical or verbal violence, exposure to domestic violence, war or even poverty) has devastating impact on their healthy development and perpetuates violence across generations

- Recognize that the unpaid work of caring for a child, especially during the critical time between pregnancy and age 3, is essential but also time consuming, and address the unequal distribution of this work and the resulting time poverty for many mothers. Address the issue as a major obstacle to gender equality and women's participation to both the economic and political spheres. Adopt reductive and redistributive policies, notably through the development of targeted public infrastructure and services.

- Prioritize girls' education, and promote women economic empowerment and financial independence: healthy, educated and empowered mothers have healthy, educated and confident daughters and sons.

  The World Bank also found that women reinvest an average of 90% of their income in their families, vs. 30 - 40% for men. Mothers are more likely to use their economic resources on food, education and health care for their children, thus creating a path out of poverty and towards peace.

- Acknowledge the essential role and competences of mothers in both the family and public spheres: mothers need to be aware that they represent a decisive strength to tackle the multiple influences that undermine our societies.

  For example, mothers are often the pillars of the family, and they are in a privileged position to detect early signs of violent extremism and radicalization. They can learn to identify these signs of unhappiness in their children, which are similar early warnings whether they come from harassment, radicalization, drugs, or sexual abuse. Mothers should be considered as important partners in the fight against terrorism and other forms of violence and threats.

- Implement resolution 1325 on Women Peace and Security

  Mothers should be able to act on the same level as other actors of civil society, get involved in public life, recognize their responsibilities, and trust themselves and their capacities in order to contribute to the development of a more balanced and safer society.

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1 UN SG Antonio Guterres, Remarks to the General Assembly High-level Dialogue on 'Building sustainable peace for all: synergies between the 2030 agenda for sustainable development and sustaining peace', 24 January 2017

2 See MMM Statement fort he 2016 ECOSOC HLS or the AMR "Leave no mother behind: empowered mothers are change makers that can make the SDGs succeed" Ref. E/2016/NGO/46

The call from Maggy Barankitse, the "Angel of Burundi"3

"Becoming a mother implies all at once, pain, joy and a mission. It is a joy to expand this great human family, when one thinks of these privileged moments where a child's smile simply makes you want to laugh, with no reason. Motherhood is a mission weaved with years of toil and on-going studies at the school of life. This is perhaps why mothers should be called to serve beyond the immediate environment of their families.

The reason is simple. If we want a world with more love, tolerance, perseverance for peace and the resolution of conflicts, a world where women would represent 50% of the executive, judicial and parliamentary instances, 50% of women at the United Nations and at the African Union… then mothers are best placed to reach these objectives.

Indeed, their lives provide mothers with the best Curriculum Vitae. Their children are the hardest government to contend with. Their families are the most difficult people to convince, to negotiate with, that they will always have to compromise with. Always! It is inherent to our nature as women and to our mission as mothers. […]
If we want to build a new peace-loving generation capable of renunciation in this world of conflicts, the role of mothers is vital."

3 Speech prepared by Maggy Barankitse for MMM Intervention at the UNESCO Forum "From the promotion to the construction of peace with NGOs", Queretaro (Mexico), November 2016